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Notes on the nests of five species in south-eastern Ecuador, including the first breeding data for Black-and-white Tody-Tyrant *Poecilotriccus capitalis*

by Guy M. Kirwan

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Knowledge of the breeding ecology and seasons of Ecuadorian avifauna has increased exponentially during the last decade, based almost entirely on the work of the Yanayacu Natural History Research Group. Despite this increase in our understanding, many gaps remain, some of which are even possible for the casual observer to fill through wholly opportunistic observations. Here I describe breeding observations of five bird species, all in the province of Zamora-Chinchipe, south-east Ecuador, made during the course of other field work. For one species, Black-and-white Tody-Tyrant *Poecilotriccus capitalis*, the information presented here appears to represent the first breeding data for this poorly known bird. All measurements are estimates, unless otherwise stated.

STRIPED TREEHUNTER *Thripadectes holostictus*

A generally uncommon and somewhat patchily distributed Andean bird, from south-west Venezuela to north-west Bolivia (Ridgely & Tudor 2009), the first description of its nest and detailed breeding data were provided only very recently (Zyskowski & Greeney 2010). Together with J. Price, I discovered a nest of this species in a hole within a south-facing earth bank, overhung and sheltered by rootlets, along the Quebrada Honda trail in Tapichalapa Biological Reserve (04°30'S, 79°10'W), on 28 September 2010. Remarkably, the first nest of this species to be described in the literature was found in a very similar situation on the same trail, in November 2006 (Zyskowski & Greeney 2010). Precise measurements of the hole were not taken but were clearly similar to those reported by Zyskowski & Greeney

(2010); however, the burrow we found was just *c.*1 m above ground level. An adult flushed from the nest as we walked the trail, whereupon we stationed ourselves *c.*10 m away and waited for the bird to return in order to confirm identification. This it did after *c.*10 minutes, albeit very cautiously, keeping low down in cover and moving slowly towards the nest until it was directly opposite on the other side of the trail, then flying swiftly into the hole. I had no further opportunity to conduct observations at this nest, and I am unaware of its contents.

LINED ANTSHRIKE *Thamnophilus tenuepunctatus*

A relatively recently used but empty nest was seen at Copalinga Ecolodge, between Zamora and Podocarpus National Park, on 1 October 2010; the user's identity was confirmed by C. Witts (pers. comm.). The nest of this species has only been described once previously (Greeney & Gelis 2007). That at Copalinga was very similar to the previous description, including the 'tail' of hanging moss, but differed in being much lower above the ground, just *c.*1 m and was placed in the outer layer of a narrow ornamental hedge close to the lodge's restaurant, which meant that people must have passed the nest several times per day. Greeney & Gelis' nest (in north-east Ecuador) had eggs in late March; that discussed here obviously more closely accorded with the general breeding periods for birds in the south-east of the same country (Greeney *et al.* 2010).

BLACK-AND-WHITE TODY-TYRANT *Poecilotriccus capitalis*

Found across western Amazonia and adjacent foothills, from south-east Colombia south to eastern Peru, disjunctly as far as dpto. Pasco, and in south-west Brazil at two localities in Rondônia, as well as much more locally and sparsely across east Amazonian Brazil, at single localities in northern Mato Grosso and south-east Pará (Sick 1997, Zimmer *et al.* 1997, Walther 2004, Schulenberg *et al.* 2007). Its published altitudinal range reaches 1,350 m (Walther 2004, Ridgely & Tudor 2009), although the species is known to 1,500 m at Wild Sumaco lodge, dpto. Napo, Ecuador (pers. obs.). The nest of *P. capitalis* is apparently undescribed (Walther 2004; H. F. Greeney pers. comm.). On 4 October 2010, very close to Cabañas Yankuam (04°14'54.03'S, 78°39'34.04'W), in the Cordillera del Condor near the border with Peru, together with J. Price and S. Smith, I found a nest of this species under construction. I discovered the nest when I heard this species' distinctive vocalisation and shortly afterwards observed both members of a pair in the understorey a few metres distant. After a few minutes, the male (this species is strongly sexually dimorphic in plumage) was observed to visit the previously unseen nest, which was sited *c.*1.3 m above ground in an unidentified 2.5 m tall understorey tree. The general environs of the nest consisted of an old treefall gap measuring *c.*10 m by 8 m, within old second growth with a canopy height of *c.*25 m, and *c.*8 m from a stream. Immediately surrounding the nest tree was a dense understorey with many fallen logs and large, exposed rocks. Dimensions of the nest (see Fig. 1) were calculated using dial callipers and measured 143 mm top to bottom with a 'tail' of vegetation extending an additional 120 mm below the main structure, and at its widest point the nest measured 133 mm side to side. What was obviously the egg chamber was sited in the upper half of the nest and measured 47.5 mm high by 55.0 mm wide externally. The nest was suspended from a very narrow branch, being sited approximately halfway between the tree's main trunk and the branch's tip. It conformed to the type closed / ovoid / pensile, under the system proposed by Simon & Pacheco (2005) for describing nests of Neotropical birds. Constituent materials included fine strips of bark, dark rootlets, living and dead leaf parts, and rhizomorphs. Between 14.00 h and 15.00 of the same day, no further activity was observed at the nest and the birds were silent.

Figure 1. Nest of Black-and-white Tody-Tyrant *Poecilotriccus capitalis*, Cabañas Yankuam, prov. Zamora-Chinchipe, Ecuador, 4 October 2010 (Guy M. Kirwan)

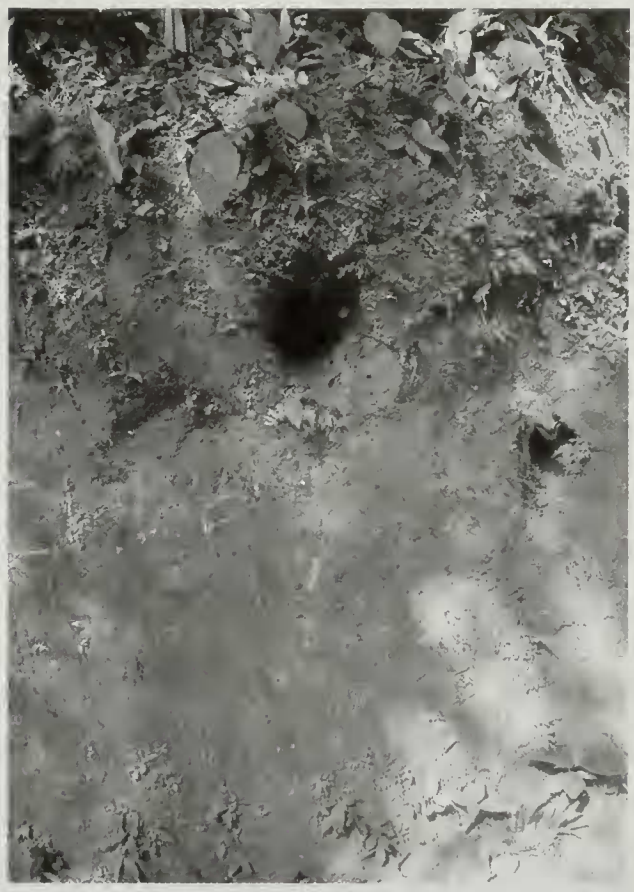

Figure 2. Nest hole of White-thighed Swallow *Neochelidon tibialis*, Podocarpus National Park, prov. Zamora-Chinchipe, Ecuador, 1 October 2010 (Guy M. Kirwan)

Figure 3. Nest of Green-and-gold Tanager *Tangara schrankii*, with two nestlings, Copalinga Ecolodge, prov. Zamora-Chinchipe, Ecuador, 1 October 2010 (Guy M. Kirwan)

Figure 4. Chicks of Green-and-gold Tanager *Tangara schrankii*, Copalinga Ecolodge, prov. Zamora-Chinchipe, Ecuador, 1 October 2010 (Guy M. Kirwan)

According to Walther (2004), the only species of *Poecilotriccus* for which breeding data were previously available is Ochre-faced Tody-Flycatcher *P. plumbeiceps*, whose nest (described from Argentina: de la Peña 1989) was broadly similar in being taller than wide, with a 'tail' of vegetation dangling below it, and a more rotund egg chamber, as well as in being suspended from a thin branch.

WHITE-THIGHED SWALLOW *Neochelidon tibialis*

Rather local from eastern Panama, Colombia, southern Venezuela and the Guianas south to northern Bolivia, as well as even more sparsely across Amazonia and in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest (Ridgely & Tudor 2009). Turner (2004) mentioned that the species' breeding biology is very poorly known, although the season appears to be January to May in Colombia and Ecuador (*cf.* Hilty & Brown 1986, Cisneros-Heredia 2006), and February to September in Panama (*cf.* Wetmore *et al.* 1984), while Kirwan (2009) described finding an active nest in south-east Brazil in late February. I found a nest (Fig. 2) attended by both adults along the trail into Podocarpus National Park along the río Bombuscaro. The nest was observed for a total of *c.*25 minutes, on 30 September and 1 October 2010; the adults typically remained inside for 1–2 minutes, sometimes less, and one or other would visit every 30 seconds to five minutes, always arriving and departing very rapidly. The nest itself was located in a one-metre-tall bank beside the trail, *c.*75 cm above the ground, accessed via a rather large near-circular hole, which became a tunnel, *c.*12 cm wide, and at least 1 m long, which dipped slightly at the end (Fig. 2). The nest chamber itself was not visible. This is the first nest to be found in Ecuador. That the species should also breed in the latter part of the year in this part of the country is unsurprising, given that Greeney *et al.* (2010) assembled breeding data for many birds in this region of Ecuador from the period August–December. Other nests have also been in holes in banks, sometimes along rivers, as well as in old woodpecker holes (Wetmore *et al.* 1984).

GREEN-AND-GOLD TANAGER *Tangara schrankii*

Nominate *T. s. schrankii* ranges across western Amazonia from south-east Colombia south to northern Bolivia and east to northern Mato Grosso, Brazil (Ridgely & Tudor 2009). Previously published breeding data for this species concern three nests, all found in eastern Peru, in late July (eggs about to hatch), early August (eggs) and the second week of October (under construction), the first of which was 75 cm above ground, the second 2 m above ground in a small palm tree, and the last 1 m above ground (Marra 1990, Isler & Isler 1999). C. Witts showed me a nest wherein the young had just hatched (probably the previous day), placed *c.*1.7 m above the ground at the edge of a small, open-air orchidarium and >2 m from the restaurant at Copalinga Ecolodge, between Zamora and Podocarpus National Park, on 29 September 2010 (Fig. 3). The nest was constructed in an unidentified tree *c.*6 m tall and placed within (i.e. wholly supported by) a large, live bromeliad attached to the main trunk. Many dead leaves (and some tiny living pieces), some green ferns, tiny particles of moss, and some small sticks formed the outside of the nest; however, the nest was finely lined with blackish and dark red fungal rootlets. The nest was well shaded by leaves from above. From a few metres distance, while brooding the chicks, the adult was only just visible above the nest's rim. The chicks were almost naked, with some fine dark grey down, principally on the head and sides of the back (Fig. 4). On 1 October 2010, during a period when the adult was away from the nest foraging, the nest was measured using dial callipers: outside the cup was 120 mm by 97.5 mm at its widest, and 39.5 mm deep, while the egg cup was 39.4 mm by 42.5 mm, and 29.5 mm deep. Only one adult was ever observed in the vicinity of the nest and feeding visits appeared to be irregular, based on my sporadic observations over a three-day period. The only food proffered to the chicks appeared to be dark fruit pulp, despite that the adult was regularly observed at the lodge's banana feeders. Following each observed feed, the adult always brooded the chicks for at least ten minutes. Both chicks fledged on 13 October 2010 and next day they were being fed by an adult at the lodge's feeders (C. Witts *in litt.* 2010). It is worth remarking that C. Witts showed me an old nest

of Green-and-gold Tanager, from the previous season, constructed just <10 cm above the ground in a planted hedgerow near one of the visitor's cabins.

The timing of the Ecuador nest corresponds well with the previously available data from Peru. Although Isler & Isler (1999) commented that the majority of *Tangara* construct principally moss nests, Marra (1990) already demonstrated that this is not the case for *T. schrankii* and Gonzaga & Castiglioni (2006) questioned whether it was really true for some other species too, among them Brassy-breasted Tanager *T. desmaresti*. Nonetheless, the preponderance of dead or dried material used in the nests of *T. schrankii* reported to date, along with similar materials in nests of Lesser Antillean Tanager *T. cucullata* (Isler & Isler 1999), does seem unusual. Wood *et al.* (1992), for instance, reported that a Paradise Tanager *T. chilensis* nest in south-east Peru was principally, but not exclusively, constructed of green moss. The use of fungal rhizomorphs as a lining material in *Tangara* nests was already reported by Sick (1957) and confirmed by Gonzaga & Castiglioni (2006). Unlike the observations reported by Gelis *et al.* (2006) at a nest of Golden Tanager *Tangara arthus*, visits to feed the young were made by a single, silent adult, but the fledging period of *c.*2 weeks is similar in both species.

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Taxonomic notes on some Muscicapidae

by Dario Zuccon

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The valid name of Slaty-backed Flycatcher

Pygmy Blue Flycatcher *Muscicapella hodgsoni* (Moore, 1854) is a tiny Oriental flycatcher. Two independent studies, using in part different molecular markers, demonstrated that this species is not related to the other blue flycatchers (*Cyornis* and *Niltava*), but instead belongs to a clade including the majority of the *Ficedula* flycatchers and should be known as *Ficedula hodgsoni* (Outlaw & Voelker 2006, Zuccon & Ericson 2010).

With the transfer of *Muscicapella hodgsoni* to *Ficedula* the name *Ficedula hodgsonii* (J. Verreaux, 1871), in use for Slaty-backed Flycatcher, becomes preoccupied. Outlaw & Voelker (2006) suggested that the valid name for Slaty-backed Flycatcher should be *Ficedula erithacus* (Jerdon & Blyth, 1861). This does not appear to be correct.

Slaty-backed Flycatcher was originally described as *Siphia erithacus* Jerdon & Blyth, 1861, from a specimen collected in Sikkim (Jerdon 1862; holotype in the Natural History Museum [BMNH], Tring, examined: BMNH 1886.4.1.1913). This name is preoccupied by *Siphia erythaca* Jerdon, 1847, currently a subjective junior synonym of Mugimaki Flycatcher *Ficedula mugimaki* (Temminck, 1836). The names *erithacus* and *erythaca* differ only in the use of *i* or *y* and according to Art. 58.2 of the *International code of zoological nomenclature* (hereafter the Code, ICZN 1999) they are deemed variant spellings. The two names are thus primary homonyms (Art. 53.3.1) and *Siphia erithacus* Jerdon & Blyth, 1861, is invalid.

The next available name is *Siphia hodgsonii* J. Verreaux, 1871, described from a single male collected at Moupin (= Baoxing County, Sichuan) by A. David (Verreaux, 1872; holotype in the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle [MNHN], Paris, examined: MNHN CG. 1870-665).

During an expedition to the Naga Hills, Godwin-Austen (1874) collected four specimens of Slaty-backed Flycatcher at Japvo Peak, Nagaland. The single male was identified as *Siphia erithaca* but the three females were presumed to belong to an unknown form and they were described as a distinct species, *Erythrosterna sordida* Godwin-Austen, 1874 (syntypes in BMNH examined: BMNH 1895.7.14.395, 1895.7.14.396, 1895.7.14.397).

Oates (1883, 1890) was the first to apply the trivial name *hodgsonii* as the valid name to the Slaty-backed Flycatcher, recognising that *Siphia erithacus* Jerdon & Blyth, 1861, was invalid due to primary homonymy and that *Erythrosterna sordida* Godwin-Austen, 1874, was a junior synonym. The same treatment was followed by Sharpe (1903).